



EVERY DAY IN EVERY WAY

My USDA

A Progress Report for Employees on USDA's Cultural Transformation

June 2011
Volume I, Issue 6

USDA's CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION ACTION ITEMS

- LEADERSHIP
- RECRUITMENT
AND RETENTION
- TALENT
MANAGEMENT
- EMPLOYEE
DEVELOPMENT
- CUSTOMER FOCUS
AND COMMUNITY
OUTREACH

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A Message from USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack

(Editor's Note: The Secretary spoke with Tom Fox of the Partnership for Public Service as part of the Washington Post's Federal Coach column on May 11, 2011. The Secretary was asked about the importance of Federal service. His response is excerpted below.)

Secretary Vilsack: Whenever I travel, I try to find an opportunity to express appreciation to the people that work for USDA. Unfortunately, and all too frequently, there is a disconnect between the citizens of this country and the good citizens that work in these offices who work hard and struggle every day to try to provide services. It's important for people to know that I think government service is a noble undertaking and public servants work hard and care deeply about the people they're responsible for.

Tom Fox: *How do you surface ideas and problems at the USDA?*

Secretary Vilsack: A way of showing respect to employees is making myself available to try to answer questions they have. It gives me a chance to educate, but it also gives me a chance to be educated. If I

don't make myself available and I don't listen carefully, something may go unattended, and the result is that you get employees who are disconnected from either leadership or the goals of the leadership.

People like me may not fully appreciate, when we come to Washington, the difference between those who are here as political appointees with limited terms and those who are career people who have been around for a while and have more permanency to their effort here. Political appointees need to stop, look, and listen from time to time, because there are a lot of things that career folks can share with us that will make our efforts more successful than they otherwise would be. It's a good balance, but it's important for the political appointees to respect that balance.

As governor, I learned the important role of both the internal and external message. The internal message to employees is a message of respect and



modeling the behavior you expect folks to live up to. The external message is recognizing that, while you're doing a lot of different things, it's really hard for people to understand them all. It's important for you to try to put them in a frame of reference people can understand and that you repeat them a sufficient number of times to penetrate through all of the other challenges that people have in day-to-day life.

Contact the staff of My USDA
via email at

MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov.

And please be sure to visit the
[USDA Cultural Transformation
Website.](#)

Secretary Vilsack Wins FAPAC Award

USDA was recognized with nine awards at the recent Federal Asian Pacific American Council (FAPAC), including an award for Secretary Vilsack, showing appreciation for his leadership.

Judy Olsen with Rural Development in Washington State gave the keynote address and received the award on the Secretary's behalf. Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights Dr. Joe Leonard, was the keynote speaker later at the closing banquet.

Over 35 USDA employees attended the conference and six were Senior Executive Service. Overall the conference was worthwhile and provided many valuable professional development classes, Diversity Program enhancement training, and invaluable networking opportunities. USDA's partnership with FAPAC is successful, worthwhile, and strong as ever.

APHIS Improves Business Process to Help Rescue Animals in Need

When you think of Cultural Transformation, the first things that usually pop into your mind are diversity and inclusion – not business process improvement. But business process improvement is at the heart of Cultural Transformation, and when done properly, not only supports diversity and inclusion, but embraces it.

By including employees with diverse viewpoints and educational and cultural backgrounds in policy-making and leadership decisions, we are putting the principles of Cultural Transformation to work, in a very real way, to better serve our customers. The Investigative and Enforcement Services (IES) within the Marketing and Regulatory Program's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Services is doing just that.

Among its many investigative and enforcement activities, IES conducts unannounced visits to licensed or registered facilities (animal exhibitors, dog breeders, etc.) to ensure compliance with the Horse Protection Act and the Animal Welfare Act.

Far too often, animals are inhumanely treated for personal gain causing physical harm or trauma. Horses are maimed to strut more prominently, exhibited animals suffer from untreated diseases or injuries, puppies are starved or forced to live in their own waste. Without swift and decisive intervention, many more helpless animals will suffer at the cruelty of these violators. To ensure regulatory compliance, deter future violations and, ultimately, ensure the health and safety of these animals, it is critically important that these reports be legally sufficient and issued in a timely manner.

USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Services (APHIS) investigates and enforces the Animal Welfare Act at licensed or registered facilities.

To improve timeliness, IES has undertaken a business process improvement analysis of the review and issuance of the final report of investigation. IES is using Lean Six Sigma (LSS) principles to better analyze and document current processes, determine where improvements can be made, and develop streamlined solutions. In keeping with LSS principles, IES established a diverse team comprised of personnel with varied educational and work backgrounds (from high school level educations through doctoral degrees in agronomy and jurisprudence), and cultural, racial, and gender representation. The team identified no fewer than sixteen separate customers and stakeholders who have an interest in IES' enforcement work, and confirmed that IES customers' greatest interests include effective, efficient, and timely enforcement. IES is optimistic that this effort will lead to significant improvements in its enforcement activities.

IES has embraced the underlying principles of cultural transformation. IES includes a diverse team of employees to



Above, before and after pictures of Apollo, a tiger saved thanks to intervention by APHIS.

Below, the IES business process improvement team meets.

review this business process and to identify its customers and stakeholders. Their issues and concerns are included in the review and decision-making process. IES is not only developing its diverse staff for greater opportunities in the future, it is improving its business processes in a real and meaningful way for its customers and stakeholders.



WHAT DO YOU THINK? MESSAGES FROM USDA EMPLOYEES

A couple of months ago, my father and I were going through my grandparents' Bible and found this poem. I retyped it to share with USDA.

My grandfather was a farmer, as was his father, in Norseland, MN, a tiny Norwegian community outside of St. Peter, MN.

Elizabeth J. Groth,
Financial Management Analyst & Claim Specialist, APHIS
Minneapolis, MN

Share your pride in USDA with a message to fellow employees.

What do you think?

Send an email to
MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov and let
us know.

Ode To A Farmer (Author unknown)

What is a farmer? Well, he is a big man or a small man. He comes in assorted shapes and sizes. Happy, sad – wide and lean...

A farmer is tomorrow's breakfast, with a grin on his face. He carries nations on his shoulders and holds the earth in his hands – and lives by the sun and the rain...

He's America riding a tractor! Democracy wearing a straw hat! A farmer is freedom, holding a hoe and the future of the world in a pair of blue overalls...

What is a farmer? Well, armies march on his muscles, cities eat on his labors. Politicians promise him things, bankers respect him and middlemen live off him...

He's a farmer! He's a strong and gentle man. Strong enough to challenge nature and gentle enough to caress a newborn calf with loving hands...

He's a day laborer and capitalist-handyman and boss-toymaker, mechanic-veterinarian, salesman-purchasing agent, production manager-weather forecaster-good neighbor...

He's the meat and potatoes of a nation...He's the ham and eggs on the menu at a restaurant...He's a Halloween pumpkin and cold watermelons at a Fourth of July picnic... He's the turkey and yams on a Thanksgiving Day dinner table.

He's a farmer...He's a gambler...He throws his seed like dice on a giant gambling table of land. He bets his muscle and know-how on the heat of the sun and the turn of a rain cloud...

He's America's best customer, the world's most constant hope...The most useful man in the nation...

HE'S A FARMER...

(Editor's note: The "Ode" is printed as received, but it is important to point out that since it was written, the nation has—thankfully—come to realize that not all farmers are "He".

(Editor's note: In the last issue of MyUSDA, we published an article responding to a news story that basically asked, "What does our government do for you?" That elicited some interesting responses, one of which is below.)

Thank you for reminding us of the many diverse programs USDA provides the public. I would like to share how those programs affected me and my family. I began working for the Forest Service in 1991 as a GS-4 Resource Clerk in Lands & Recreation. I was a single mother of 2, and my wages were so low at the time, I qualified for WIC and Food Plus. I really don't know how I would have made ends meet without those services for my children. I also qualified for State subsidized housing, but because of drugs and violence issues associated with the available housing, I did not elect to take advantage due to concerns for my children's safety.

I did find it somewhat ironic however, that I was being subsidized by the same Agency I worked for. Although I've slowly worked my way up the ladder to a level I never would have envisioned in 1991, we are still hiring many employees at low grade levels. Firefighters are a good example. I did my share of digging line throughout my career, and feel that the risks associated with fighting active fire should garner higher wages. Yes, we get hazard pay and overtime in some cases, but there are some seasons where those GS-3s, 4s & 5s do not have the opportunity to benefit from that extra pay. Consequently, young firefighters find better wages, year-round employment, and better job advancement outside of the Forest Service. Which means we are constantly recruiting and training new firefighters....at our cost.

One reflection to share with a smile. Many years ago, during our evening meal, my young children were talking about what they wanted to be when they grew up. My son wanted to be a jet fighter, and my daughter wanted to be a police woman. When I asked why they didn't want to work for the Forest Service my son's response was "Look at you Mom...you work all the time, and we're still poor!"

Thank you for your time and the article!

Sheila Sandusky
Realty Specialist, Lands
Prescott National Forest
Camp Verde, AZ



Improving Communication Between Customers and Employees at NRCS

By David Aten

Responding to correspondence is one of the purest forms of public service. NRCS knows that most Americans interact with our government through correspondence. And all NRCSers are responsible for ensuring accurate, responsive, and timely answers to everyone we serve.

But too often, letters are overlooked. The process is long and burdensome, employees lack the tools they need, and recognition for outstanding performance is non-existent. Last fall, Chief Dave White, Deputy Chief Lesia Reed, and NRCS-Executive Correspondence Management Team

(ECMT) began improving the correspondence process to ensure that NRCS lives up to the high standard that the Secretary has set.

The NRCS-ECMT team undertook a comprehensive process to understand the "as-is" process, identify roadblocks, and implement a series of improvements. We conducted a study to document the current processes, followed by a survey of over 400 staff. Through this, we discovered the actual process varied wildly across offices – and 20% were unaware there even was a process!

We have begun to simplify the process and ensure that each step is adding value.

While we are just getting started, we are already seeing dividends, and in 2011, average response times have decreased by a third. But as good as those statistics are the real measure of our success shows up in individual letters.

In March, Charlie Lotreck, an 87-year-old farmer in Connecticut, lost patience and faith in USDA after months of working with local offices to get soil maps. As a last resort he wrote the Secretary for help. To his surprise, less than a week after USDA received that letter, an NRCS employee called him and helped him get the soil maps he needed.

The next day he wrote the Secretary a second letter, which began "You are the best!!" This is the spirit of "One USDA" and public service. Working together – hard, smart, constantly improving – we are the best.

Here's a copy of the letter sent recently to Secretary Vilsack by USDA customer and farmer Charlie Lotreck, 87, of CT.

never in all my years (too many) have I ever had such prompt, effective service. No one could ask to receive more even if it were President Obama. I hope you stay serving the public for a long time; what a paragon for others in public office. Thank you so much; both properties are providing the soil maps through the D of A. Most appreciated. P.S. I went to graduate school in Iowa City - great state, fine people. E. Lotreck

NRCS Employee Personally Advances Cultural Transformation by Terry Bish

The NRCS-ECMT has started publishing a newsletter as part of the Secretary's Cultural Transformation Initiative to improve systems, share information and ideas, and acknowledge the efforts of employees thus boosting morale, improving productivity, and enhancing the work place.

"I feel overwhelmed," said Chancie McRae, Correspondence Assistant for NRCS, "this is the first time in a long time that I feel like part of a team and that I am acknowledged for something that I do. I am very proud of this accomplishment."

Chancie took the initiative of reestablishing a quarterly newsletter to help improve NRCS correspondence management. The entire NRCS Executive Correspondence Management Team (ECMT) worked on this, but Chancie volunteered, rolled her sleeves up, and took the lead. ECMT is energized, proud of the newsletter, and inspired to be of service to the public. We believe the ECMT newsletter will create better communication between those in the Agency who work on correspondence and ECMT. Ultimately, it will help the agency to continually improve correspondence so we respond correctly, accurately, and on-time—every time.



Terry Bish and Melissa Hammond recognize NRCS employee Chancie McRae (center) for her outstanding work.

A "Taste of Culture" at Food and Nutrition Services (FNS)

Over 300 Food and Nutrition Service employees participated in a tasty celebration of diverse dishes to mark USDA's Cultural Transformation on April 26, 2011.

"What an excellent demonstration of Cultural Transformation as FNS embraces our partners outside these walls as well as within," commented one employee. "Food is a wonderful way to bring people together to celebrate and appreciate differences."

The participants came out to enjoy the great variety of dishes from the many cultures represented at FNS. Food from countries all over the globe, including Mexico, Peru, the United States, Vietnam, Germany, Spain, and India, to name a few, graced the tables in the Park Center Office conference room.

As one satisfied employee said, "Food is always a great way to learn about other cultures." Employees voted on the best dishes from each of the 12 floors and the third floor took the prize.



Article by Vince Loran, FNS
Office of Civil Rights

In addition to the food tasting, about 20 employees attended a half hour workshop on learning about human differences through literature. In the first fifteen minutes, attendees participated in a listening exercise which prepared them for a special presentation by Ken Hockenberry, Human Resources Division. Ken surprised everyone with a three minute rap about his reflections on human differences and then answered questions from the enraptured audience.

Immediately after this workshop, Vince Loran, Office of Civil Rights, and Joanie Dilone, the FNS Recruiter, gave a Salsa lesson to a dozen or so aspiring dancers. This popular dance seemed to be working its magic by the enthusiasm and smiles participants displayed. As one excited dancer exclaimed, "What a beautiful opportunity to learn from others who may be different from you!"

The Office of Civil Rights spearheaded this endeavor on diversity and cultural awareness as part of the USDA Cultural Transformation Initiative. With the support of floor captains and the organizing committee, as well as all those who contributed dishes, FNS Multicultural Day was a resounding success.



Secretary Vilsack Amends USDA Civil Rights Policy Statement to Include Gender Identity and Gender Expression

USDA's Civil Rights Policy Statement now specifically prohibits discrimination based on gender identity and gender expression. Secretary Tom Vilsack signed the amended policy on June 2, 2011 as part of USDA's official annual Pride Observance. President Obama issued a proclamation recognizing June as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Pride Month.

The signing was witnessed by (from left to right) Commissioner Chai Feldblum of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission; Deputy Assistant Secretary for Administration Robin Heard; Chief Human Capital Officer William P. Milton, Jr; and Deputy Chief of Staff Carole Jett.

Ms. Jett was also honored by USDA FedGLOBE at the event for her leadership on LGBT issues.

USDA photo by Lance Cheung



Federal Travel Regulation Amended to Include Domestic Partners

The General Services Administration (GSA) has issued an amended Federal Travel Regulation (FTR) to extend certain travel and relocation benefits to Domestic partners of Federal employees. The key changes were adding terms and definitions for *Domestic part-*

ner, Domestic partnership, and Dependent, and by revising the definition of Immediate Family to include Domestic partner and children, dependent parents, and dependent brothers and sisters of the Domestic partner as named members of the employee's household.

This change is not applicable to house hunting trips and relocation taxes. The change comes in response to a Presidential memorandum issued last year. A complete copy of the rule can be found at http://www.gsa.gov/graphics/ogp/FTRAmend_2010-06_Order.pdf

If you haven't read previous issues of MyUSDA, here's your chance!

[MyUSDA Issue 1](#)

[MyUSDA Issue 2](#)

[MyUSDA Issue 3](#)

[MyUSDA Special Issue—Summary Progress](#)

[MyUSDA Issue 4](#)

[MyUSDA Issue 5](#)

UPCOMING SPECIAL EMPHASIS PROGRAM OBSERVANCES

September is Hispanic Heritage Month.

The USDA Observance is scheduled for Thursday September 15, 2011 in the Jefferson Auditorium, Washington, DC at 10am.

October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month.

The USDA Observance is scheduled for Wednesday October 5, 2011 in the Jefferson Auditorium, Washington, DC at 10am.

If you're in DC, add these to your calendar!



MyUSDA Column

Diversity & Disabilities

By Alison Levy
USDA Disability Employment Program Manager

A cornerstone of our USDA Cultural Transformation effort is to increase employment of individuals with disabilities. This column includes information, resources, and success stories from throughout USDA that are being shared to support this initiative.

Are you “Disability Cool”?

As USDA launches initiatives to increase employment, advancement, and retention of individuals with disabilities within our work place, we must ensure that our environment is inclusive of all employees. Within any culture, use of appropriate, up to date terminology helps

establish a sense of awareness and sensitivity that helps all people feel welcome.

Terminology changes over time. For example, terms used in the 1950s are no longer acceptable in 2011. The same is true for labels used to describe different types of disabilities. In fact, the term mental retardation has developed so many negative connotations throughout the years, that President Barack Obama signed S.2781, “Rosa’s Law” in October 2010, to change all references in federal law from *mental retardation* to *intellectual disability*.

To assist you in becoming more “disability cool” in the USDA workplace, please review

the following lists and visualize individuals with disabilities in an active, positive role. Think of friends, family members, and co-workers who just happen to have a disability. Remember to reference the person first. After all, we are people first; disabilities are just characteristics of who we really are as individuals.

We Need You!

Please email your questions, success stories, and resources to the USDA Disability Employment Program Manager, Alison Levy, at alison.levy@dm.usda.gov by the second Monday of each month.

Labels Not to Use	People First Language
The handicapped or disabled	People <i>with</i> disabilities
The mentally retarded	People <i>with</i> intellectual disabilities
He’s learning disabled.	He <i>has</i> a learning disability.
She’s crippled.	She <i>has</i> a physical disability.
The hearing impaired	Deaf or hard of hearing person
He’s wheelchair bound or confined to a wheelchair.	He <i>uses</i> a wheelchair.
Handicapped parking, bathrooms, etc.	<i>Accessible</i> parking, bathrooms, etc.

Forest Service Senior Leader Program Participants Meet With Agency and Department Leadership

Participants in the Forest Service’s Senior Leader Program (SLP) gathered in Washington DC for two weeks in May to discuss current policies, issues, and problems facing the agency and USDA. The group had opportunities to meet with the Chief, senior executive lead-

ers in the Washington Office and USDA, along with Capitol Hill leaders in both formal and informal settings.

The SLP prepares GS-13 and 14 employees for challenging leadership positions. It offers a rich diversity of learning experiences in residential, dialogue, distance learning, self-directed activities, and a capstone group project. The program framework allows agency leaders to explore and address cultural, social, political, economic, and biological challenges facing the Forest Service.



If you missed the party... Here's what all the buzz was about around USDA's Telework Program!



(LEFT) From left: **Danielle Turcot**, Cisco, **Mark Bigger**, Rural Development, **Jonathan Martin**, Cisco and **Vincent Chin**, Cisco, watch as Turcot demonstrates telework equipment available from Cisco for USDA employees during the Telework Brown Bag event.

(BELOW LEFT) USDA's Telework Managing Officer and Chief Human Capital Officer **William P. Milton, Jr.**, Office of Human Resources Management, describes the key initiatives of USDA's new telework program with employees. (CLOCKWISE to the RIGHT) **Ronald Turner** (FAS) and **Dana Smith** (Creative Media & Broadcast Center) review the panel topics. (BELOW RIGHT) USDA Work/Life & Wellness Manager **Mika Cross**.

USDA hosted a "Telework Program Party/Brown Bag Forum" on Tuesday, June 7th to acknowledge meeting all the requirements of the Telework Enhancement Act of 2010. The event was hosted by USDA Work/Life and Wellness Program Manager **Mika Cross**.
USDA Photos taken by Bob Nichols.

(ABOVE) From left to right: Telework party panel members were **Josh Sawislak**, Senior Fellow from the Telework Exchange; **Connie Doyle**, Senior Consultant, Trainer and Executive Coach with CI International; **Robyn Poole**, WorkLife Program Lead Specialist, Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation; **Mika Cross**, USDA Work/Life and Wellness Program Manager, Departmental Management; **Morris Tate**, Director for Business Services, Office of Operations; **Debra Arnold**, Rural Development and President, AFSCME Union Local 3870 (USDA) and **Owen Unangst**, Director, Innovations and Emerging Technologies, Office of the Chief Information Officer.

The panel discussed the advantages, cost benefits and best practices in telework across the Federal government with employees on the patio of the Jamie Whitten Building of USDA's headquarters in Washington, DC. The event included an interactive telework panel and exhibits from the field of telework, telecommuting, and mobile work environments. The party was open to all USDA employees, supervisors, managers, human resources staff, and USDA telework program coordinators. Plans for another party are in the works for December.



Since the Telework Enhancement Act of 2010 was passed last December, USDA has been hard at work to meet all the requirements of the law by the June 7, 2011 deadline. USDA placed in the top 80% for meeting requirements according to the Telework Exchange report. See the Report here: [Federal Telework Exchange Progress Report](#). USDA successfully met all of the Act's requirements which included:

- ◆ Establishing a Telework Policy
- ◆ Officially appointing a Telework Managing Officer (TMO)
- ◆ Offering an interactive Telework training program
- ◆ Incorporating Telework into the COOP strategies and exercises
- ◆ Determining eligibility for positions that are suited for Telework
- ◆ Notifying employees of their eligibility

180 Days of Telework...Now What?

So what's next? USDA reported more than 58,000 positions as eligible to participate in telework. In the coming months, your Telework Coordinators will be pushing to ensure that at least 40% of all eligible employees are participating in regular/recurring or ad/hoc telework. Employees must first complete a USDA Telework Agreement form and complete required training before getting started. Specific details about USDA's Telework Program can be found in [Departmental Regulation, 4080-811-002](#).

Are you interested in learning more about USDA's Telework Program and other top Work/Life and Wellness initiatives? Be sure to subscribe to our Work/Life and Wellness listserve to stay in the know! Send an email to telework@dm.usda.gov or connect with our [Work/Life and Wellness](#) if you have a USDA Connect account!

FNCS Labor Management Forum Promotes Cultural Transformation

May 17th dawned with six labor representatives and six management representatives gathered at the headquarters of the Food and Nutrition Service in Alexandria, Virginia, for the first meeting of the FNCS Labor Management Forum (LMF).

Formed as a result of Executive Order 13522, the Forum has specific obligations to enhance the labor management relationship, promote employee engagement and satisfaction, and collaborate to examine and improve organizational effectiveness. The Forum is an integral part of cultural transformation. It is predicated on inclusion; its membership is diverse; its work empowers our talented employees through their representatives, and its primary reason for being is to fuel FNCS along the path toward becoming a higher performing organization.

Forum Co-chairs Patricia Maggi, President of NTEU Chapter 226, and Jeff Tribiano, Associate Administrator for Management,

Technology and Finance and COO, presided over presentations by FNCS and NTEU staff regarding the recent history behind Forums nationally and at USDA, the Forum's formal mandates, and the expectation that Forums will function through consensus with a problem-solving perspective. The Forum reviewed the principle of pre-decisional involvement (PDI). With PDI, management

reaches out to labor earlier than traditionally may have been the case to invite assistance in issue assessment, problem identification and ensuring that labor representatives' perspectives are weighted in the formulation of management decisions. PDI contrasts with the more traditional and sometimes more contentious formal notification and bargaining process that begins after management decisions have been made.

Throughout the day, Members engaged in animated and constructive discussion, acknowledging the Forum framework and responsibilities, recognizing the challenges it

faces in accomplishing its formidable objectives, and establishing a constructive platform for progress.

In addition to Pat Maggi, the Forum's Labor Members are Linda Williams (President, NTEU Chapter 237, MWRO), June Claiborn (President, NTEU Chapter 240, MPRO), John Ferraina (President, AFGE Local 2735 (MARO), Angelia Bass (President, NTEU Chapter 268, SERO) and Jackie Henry (President, NTEU Chapter 227, WRO). Chapter 226 Executive Vice President Dwayne Grismore substituted for Ms. Henry during the May 17 meeting. Management Forum Members are Mr. Tribiano, Erin Swanson-Hall (SERO), Monique Hatten (MARO), Kathryn Law (FPAB, HQ), Tama Eliff (SNP, HQ), and Karen Walker (SNAP, HQ).

MaryAnn Ferris (NERO) substituted for Ms. Law for this initial meeting.



Assistant Secretary's Office Awards Golden Envelope to NRCS-ECMT



(L-R) **Margaret Robinson**, Writer-Editor; **Chancie McRae**, Correspondence Assistance; **Dr. Alma Hobbs**, Associate Assistant Secretary for Departmental Management; **John Turay**, NRE Program Analyst; **Catherine D. Hawkins**, Correspondence Control Officer, **Ann Mills**, Deputy Under Secretary NRE; **Terry Bish**, Team Leader, ECMT

The Natural Resources Conservation Service's (NRCS) Executive Correspondence Management Team (ECMT), formerly known as the Conservation Correspondence Service Team, was awarded the Golden Envelope Award for successfully improving NRCS' correspondence process, accuracy, and timeliness of responses. According to the Office of the Executive Secretariat (OES), going into the first quarter of fiscal year 2011, NRCS had 74 late or inaccurate correspondence responses. ECMT, a small team in NRCS' Public Affairs Division consisting of a Team Leader, a Correspondence Control Officer, a Writer-Editor, and a Correspondence Assistant, rose to the challenge and reduced the agency's late and inaccurate correspondence to zero! This achievement resulted in recognition by the Assistant Secretary and a tremendous sense of pride and accomplishment throughout ECMT, NRCS, and Natural Resources and Environment. Learn more about the NRCS-ECMT on page 4.

DIVERSITY IS BETTER WHEN IT IS SHARED

By Connie Abadie

Connie Abadie is an Information Technology Specialist in ITSD. She organized and ran this year's event. This is the third year in a row that Connie has done so.

As a part of OCFO's Cultural Transformation Plan, the National Finance Center (NFC), Information Technology Services Division (ITSD) held its third annual Diversity Luncheon on Thursday, April 21, 2011.

The theme for this year's luncheon was "Diversity Is Better When It Is Shared." Each individual in the division was encouraged to reach out and bring in an individual from a different office to share in the cultural transformation. More than 300 people participated in the luncheon, making this the largest diversity luncheon in the history of NFC.

Employees donated a variety of multi-cultural dishes that were arranged in different categories (appetizers, soups, salads, meats, casseroles, and desserts).

Overall, more than 75 different menu items

were donated representing different cultures, ethnic groups, and geographic locations. These "diverse" dishes represented the cultural diversity of the Office of the Chief Financial Officer employees that work together in New Orleans.

To further enhance this diverse cultural experience, several employees donated cultural artifacts that they displayed so that the attendees could learn more about these cultures.

The luncheon program began with the U.S. Coast Guard Color Guard providing an inspirational posting of the colors followed by the Pledge of Allegiance. In his opening remarks, Mr. John White, Director of NFC, focused on what diversity meant to him throughout his career.

Mr. White was followed by Judy Welcker with the NFC's Civil Rights and Conflict Management Office speaking about the Inclusion University.

Finally, Mr. Gil Hawk, ITSD Director, discussed the concept of diversity and how it encompasses acceptance and respect. He related diversity in the workplace to the luncheon menu. While each dish is unique unto itself and is good, the combination of dishes into a meal makes it a superior feast.

The same holds true within the workforce. Each individual is unique and special. When that uniqueness is combined within a team, the results are significantly better.

This is exactly what was displayed at this year's luncheon, where the managers and employees teamed up and were able to socialize with one another in a multi-cultural atmosphere. It is living proof that "Diversity Is Better When It Is Shared."



More than 300 National Finance Center employees shared a diversity luncheon as part of the Secretary's Cultural Transformation.



MyUSDA Publication Schedule (for the remaining fiscal year)

- ◆ July *MyUSDA*, Thursday, July 14, 2011—deadline for submissions June 30, 2011
- ◆ August *MyUSDA*, Thursday, August 11, 2011—deadline for submissions August 3, 2011
- ◆ September *MyUSDA*, Thursday September 8, 2011—deadline for submissions August 31, 2011

Guidance on Submissions to *MyUSDA*

Submissions to *MyUSDA* should indicate progress that you, your agency, or your mission area has achieved toward implementing the Secretary's Cultural Transformation (CT) Initiative. Submissions may be in the form of a traditional article with a byline (with accompanying photos strongly preferred), a first-person account (describing a personal work-related experience relating to CT progress), or a "brief" (just a few sentences describing a successful Cultural Transformation event, group, initiative or activity...or some other relevant worklife issue) The ideal submission is a great picture with about 75-150 words to go along with it.

Email submissions or further inquiries to MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov.

Rites of Passage Receives PCTA Partnership Award

By Ken L. Sandusky

VANCOUVER, WA – The Gifford Pinchot and NAACP Vancouver Branch's Rites of Passage program has received the Pacific Crest Trail Association 2010 Partnership Award. "The Partnership Award is given for exceptional assistance to the PCTA and contributions to the PCTA mission," said Pacific Crest Trail Association Columbia Cascades Regional Representative, Dana Berthold.

The Forest Service and the Pacific Crest Trail Association (PCTA) host students every year for Vancouver NAACP Rites of Passage (ROP) culmination projects. Twenty ROP graduates and their chaperones conduct restoration work on the Pacific Crest Trail (PCT) in the Gifford Pinchot National Forest.

In 2010, the first of two three-day work sessions occurred on the PCT near Cultus Creek Campground. Here, students completed repairs on six miles of the PCT widening trail tread and removing encroaching brush.

The second work session for 2010 focused on a section of the PCT near Midway Meadows on the Cowlitz Valley Ranger District. While camping at Walupt Lake Campground, students completed trail restoration, erosion control, and rock work. This was the first time they did rock work, reported Earl Ford, Gifford Pinchot Natural Resources Officer. He said they used large rocks to build steps and benches to harden trail tread and other structures to divert water from the trail. The students also got their first chance to work around pack-animals.



The Backcountry Horsemen packed equipment and supplies into remote work locations.

The Rites of Passage program provides four weeks of cultural immersion and education in environmental and social justice. Ford said this is the only partnership between the NAACP and PCTA, and it may be the only NAACP trail-user group partnership in the country.

"This is an outstanding opportunity for urban youth, especially those of color, to get out and make a contribution on their National Forest," said Ford. "These trips create memories at places they've never been. We hope they will take their children out there someday to show them the things they did as teenagers in the program. Just think of the memories we are creating."

Contact: Call the Gifford Pinchot at 360-891-5000 for more information or visit <http://www.naacpvanc.org/>



USDA Kicks Off 2011 FEDS FEED FAMILIES Food Drive

Deputy Secretary Merrigan Sets USDA Goal of Half a Million Pounds of Healthful Food

A Message from Deputy Secretary Kathleen Merrigan

This year's "Feds Feed Families" food drive provides an opportunity for members of the federal family to come together to help families who are struggling to put food on the table. As the Secretary mentioned in a recent email, food banks and food pantries are in desperate need of our assistance this summer, as summertime is when they see the highest levels of need.

Our USDA "Feds Feed Families" goal this year is to donate more than 500,000 pounds of healthful food, including at least 100,000 pounds of fresh produce from our People's Gardens, to food banks and pantries across the country. I have no doubt that, with coordination and momentum, USDA employees can far exceed that

goal. I know that many of you have hit the ground running. For example, we've already heard from Lori Linn, who works for APHIS in Fort Wayne, Indiana, who said:

"...I wanted to let you know my plans here in Indiana - I am donating my back yard... The three acres are being developed and planted as I type and ALL of the produce is being donated to local Fort Wayne food banks. So I think with this contribution, the Department may exceed any other in amounts donated (weather permitting)."

Thanks Lori, and thanks to those of you who are already working hard to support this effort! The "Feds Feed Families" campaign is a great complement to the work

we already do every day, in every way, to serve our communities. And I look forward to hearing more about what folks are doing to support this campaign, so feel free to email our "Feds Feed Families" team about your efforts at collaborate@usda.gov.

Sincerely,

Kathleen Merrigan
Deputy Secretary

P.S. I guess I should also note that we have a little friendly competition going with our friends over at the Department of Defense. As you know, USDA led the pack last year, donating more than 465,000 pounds of food. This year, DOD is eager to usurp our title, and they have set their goal at 730,000 pounds of food. No pressure.



USDA Deputy Secretary Kathleen Merrigan and OPM Director John Berry joined other officials to prepare a meal at the kickoff event for this year's Feds Feed Families food drive.

The meal was one that costs \$16 and would feed a family of four a meal a day for four different days. The \$16 amount is significant because it represents the minimum amount that the Food and Nutrition Service provides.

Risk Management Agency Managers' Cultural Transformation Training

By Sara Buettner-Connelly

The Risk Management Agency provided Cultural Transformation (CT) training to all of its managers during a recent three-day managers meeting in Kansas City. Administrator Bill Murphy kicked off the training, affirming his commitment to the Agency's CT efforts and was followed by a succession of speeches from the Agency's top leadership affirming their commitment to the change effort.

The 12-member Cultural Transformation Task Force conducted training for 67 managers in Kansas City and Washington DC (via video conferencing). The two 4-hour CT blocks included presentations, videos, brainstorming exercises, and group break-outs. Task Force members elaborated on the purpose, meaning, and scope of CT and ended the first day with a discussion and break-out sessions to explore improving RMA's low rating on the previous year's Employee Viewpoint Survey. Improving RMA's score is a top priority for the Task Force as well as RMA leadership.

During the several breakout sessions, the managers brainstormed strategies for improving the employee's work experience. Establishing a formal mentoring and detail program were among the ideas that different groups explored. The training proved to be both educational and inspiring. But their work isn't done. The CT Task Force now turns its attention to creating the 4-hour CT training that the remaining Agency employees will be receiving.



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If you have ideas for future articles, contact us at MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov

If you'd like to share your feedback about Feds Feed Families, the Cultural Transformation, telework, diversity, or any other aspect of worklife at USDA, send an email to: MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov or visit USDA's [Work/Life and Wellness](#) community website if you have access to USDA Connect.



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